insideacting podcast presents...

A Conversation with "The Working Actress"

theworkingactress.blogspot.com

We wanted to get an interview with the blogosphere's favorite anonymous actor, but the problem is...she's anonymous! So, she was gracious enough to give us the following text interview. Please enjoy!

Inside Acting Podcast: How and why did you get into acting? Is there a central story or event in your life that put you on this path? Are you from Los Angeles originally, or are you a transplant?

The Working Actress: First off, let me just thank you guys for asking me to be a part of your podcast....especially in this unconventional way [as a written interview]. It's a weird road navigating how I'm used to doing interviews, etc as myself vs this anonymous version of myself. So seriously, thank you for being so accommodating.

OK -- now to the questions. I'm from LA originally, so when you're surrounded by the industry, it's more of the norm to get into it as a career rather than not to. And even though I did theater in high school, and always loved acting, I hated the idea of being some cliche girl from LA who just becomes an actress....because she's pretty and liked to act. That never set well with me. So I went to college out of state, lived out of the country for a bit, had all this life experience, and came back to LA. I think in the back of my mind I always knew I would end up in the industry in some capacity, and acting was (for me) a natural start.

IAP: What has the process of starting out as an actor to getting to where you are now been like? What obstacles have you come up against time and time again? Has there been anything that's been easier for you than you thought it would be?

WA: OK, literally I read that and started laughing. There have been countless moment of "why the hell am I doing this?" I knew going into this field that it wouldn't be easy, but I had no idea just how emotionally taxing it was. Now granted, I was fortunate in that from the start I had a great agent (albeit at a low level agency) -- but when you're starting that doesn't matter. You need someone to believe in you. And it's so easy to be seduced by wanting a name brand agency or management company so you could have your resume on their fancy letterhead, but I'm telling you -- it makes zero sense at the beginning of your career. If they hip pocket you, you aren't a priority. When it comes to packaging, they're not going to think of you. And more times than not you're shelved. I fell into that trap a couple times, and it's stupid. Counterproductive. It's like the actor's version of being a label whore with clothes. A complete waste so that you can "look the part." Dumb, dumb, dumb.

At the end of the day I think it doesn't matter who you're with, so long as they have good relationships and they work for you. That's it.

Beyond representation obstacles, there have been so many more. Bitchy actresses in the waiting room, test deals gone awry, having all my scenes cut out....I mean, you name it. I've been there. And in the past when those things would happen, I would crumble. It seemed like such an injustice when the director, and all the producers are fighting against one asshole network exec to convince him that I'm the only one they want to carry this pilot....and the asshole wins. That to me is still crazy. But the more I work in this industry, the more I realize that it's just part of it. It's the politics and business of this business that are so hard to swallow. But the more educated you are about the inner workings of it, the easier it is to not take it personally.

I read a book last year called "Desperate Networks"...ugh, who is it by? I can't remember his name. He wrote "The Late Shift" also, but I didn't read that. "Desperate Networks" is an incredible read!! All the politics that go into network shows, up-fronts, pilot season...all of it. It made me understand my role as the actor in the big picture....it shifted my perspective. That's a must read. And if you haven't seen "The TV Set" then stop reading this right now, and go rent it, or Netflix it....whatever. If you haven't been through a proper pilot season and that world of testing this will give you the most accurate view of what it's like. And it's f-ing hilarious. David Duchovny, Sigourney Weaver...a must must see.

What else? Oh -- what has been easier than I expected? My comfort level on set. I used to get so nervous on set -- how could I keep up with these seasoned professionals? How could I deliver my lines best? Or at the beginning of my career, it was more like..."how can I deliver this ONE LINE best?" And what surprised me...and it happened in the past couple years....is that I get on set and it feels like a job. A real life job. It shocked me the first day it happened. It almost made me sad. Because for the first time I didn't have knots in my stomach and this awe over the fact that I was working. It was the first time it hit me that this is actually what I do -- not what I'm trying to do, but what I do. And while I still feel grateful for everything I book, the realization that I'm a working actress was...I wish I could think of a better word, but it was weird.

IAP: In your experience, is there one thing you consistently see actors do that sabotages their career?

WA: Well I can only speak to what I see people do in the waiting room, because I don't see what they do in the room. That's where it's very easy for the shit to hit the fan. Example: yapping away, asking too many questions about the scene...and by that I mean if you have legitimate questions then go for it, but you have to remember that these people have been sitting in the room all day and don't need an actor to come in and sound all "actor-y" with these endless questions. Perhaps that doesn't annoy all producers, but I know for a fact that many of them find it annoying. And here's the thing -- and I was gonna blog about this today, but I'll tell you instead -- 9 out of 10 times, they know if it's your part when you walk in the door. It's your energy, your look. Pictures they stuck on story boards, and images they dreamt about -- if you are it, when you walk in the door, then just know they are hoping you don't have a lisp or stutter. And you know what? If they love you enough, they'll get you a speech coach. Seriously.

But I digress -- back to self sabotage :) I notice a lot of people unfocused in the waiting room, or psyching themselves out. They're either chatting away with other actresses, or running their lines like madwomen. Now if that's your method, then go for it....but I think (and I say this a lot in the blog) that it's about finding a balance. Run your lines, have a drink of water, maybe listen to your ipod if that works for you....but remember that this is your one shot in the room. Why are you gonna BS with one of your competition about some mutual Facebook friend? Save that for when you're both done. I don't know...that's just me. And when I've been the focused one, and some other people are just chatting away, what I've noticed is that I book that part.

Also, at the start of your career, when you have to pre-read, it's so important to be engaging with the CDs. They are the gatekeepers. And even if the director might love you and want to have your babies, you're never gonna meet that guy unless you get through the CDs. So it's important to have them in your corner. Befriend them, remember their kids' names or dogs' names, or the trip they mention they're planning. All the stuff they may mention that you can ask about the next time you see them. So that you're a person they like as well as being an actor. And ALWAYS be nice to the assistants and associates -- they will end up being CDs and will remember if you were a brat, or only turned it on in the room.

IAP: Since you've been working in this industry, do you have any stories or experiences that stick out in your mind as a major event or turning point for you? In your experience, are there any major pitfalls actors should be on the lookout for?

WA: This is a tough one to answer because if I reveal too much you'll start to figure out who I am. And it sucks, because I want to tell you. There have been a couple things that I booked that I JUST KNEW were about to change my career. Publicists started calling my agent, I started getting invited to more red carpets and gifting suites than ever before, but somewhere in all of that the roles didn't pan out to be so life altering. Great experiences, took me up a few notches, but no big "tah-dah!" moment. And I think maybe that's a good thing for me for several reasons. I have never wanted to be famous. I've always wanted to make a great living getting to play dress up and work with awesome people. So perhaps the pace of my career is exactly where it should be. And also, I'm really private. I loathe walking the red carpet. It makes me nervous and itchy, and I don't know which way to look, and I just revert to this nerdy child that I once was. I hate it...I get off the carpet and have to shake it off. Sounds dramatic, but it's really nerve racking for me. And also, I think the lines have blurred so much these days between actors and celebrities that there are some people better served for that hand on the hip posing. I don't know. Those are the sorts of things that I know people look forward to, but I most enjoy the thrill of booking the job, and the adventure of working with new people and traveling to cool places.

I think actors should look out for a few pitfalls -- getting too cocky (because an ego will be popped in our field faster than any other), gossiping on set or anywhere for that matter (this town is SMALL), being late (awful!!), having excuses ("oh I just got these pages last night," "oh I just got over a cold." it doesn't matter -- someone may have just gotten off of a plane, gotten into a car accident, spilled coffee all over the sides, and still booked the part. So let your agent tell them backstory if they ask....you just do your best and don't give any disclaimers).

Also, and this one pains me to say...but it's true more times than not. "These people are not your friends." Ugh. I hate to say it, and I fought against it, but I think it's true. Every time I recur on a show or work with people for a long time, it feels like camp. You make instant friends -- you spend countless hours together, you text, you chat all the time, eat all your meals together, take pictures together....but as quickly as you made those friends, they are gone just as fast. This industry is transient. And while you may make some lasting friendships along the way, for the most part this is business. They can introduce you to their spouses, and buy you dinner on the production company AMEX and say, "Welcome to the family. We love you." And the next day the powers that be can recast you, fire you, forget about you. It's a horrible truth in this industry. And I will just say, that as much as I refuse to believe it (despite my personal experience with it), remember that at the end of the day it's just your JOB. And your friends are the people you had before you booked it, and that will still be there after you booked it. I hate having to tell you that, but I don't want you to set yourself up for heartbreak.

IAP: If you could give just one piece of advice to actors -- a habit or behavior, mindset, book to read, etc -- what would it be?

WA: Be kind to yourself. I think that what we are doing is hands down one of the hardest things to undertake. No, we're not coal miners, but it's not some fluff job like people outside of our industry perceive it to be. The competition is steep, the rules change all the time, and most of the time the best actor is not the one who gets the part (because it comes down to who everyone "likes" VS who everyone thinks gave the best read). It's so easy to beat ourselves up when we don't book or to wonder why. But please remember that it's a long road --but it's do-able. I never in a million years imagined that I would be at a point where I am the "choice" or on "the list" (meaning, my agency doesn't have to submit me because I'm on a list...I mean, really?????). It's amazing, and it's a testament to sticking with it even when I felt deflated. I've had to freeze my union memberships, borrow money, work jobs that I hated, endure being treated like shit on set, kiss actors with smelly breath, and cry for hours on end because I just didn't think I could take it anymore. And if you can get used to this rollercoaster -- of emotions, of work -- then that's half the battle. Other practical things: save your money, surround yourself with people outside of the industry, and keep up the hustle.

I hope this helps, and if you have any questions, please let me know.

I'm happy to be a part of this.

Shooting a film next week -- off to learn some lines. hahaha -- it seriously is never ending.

xo
WA